Two bookstores merge long literary traditions

Two bookstore operations — among the oldest and richest in Memphis literary history — are planning to merge this summer.

The Book Shelf will merge with the Blue and Gray Book Shop, probably on Sept. 1, according to Mimsy Jones, who is a partner in the ownership of The Book Shelf with Meg Turner.

Mrs. Turner is the wife of Norfleet R. Turner, head of Data Communications Corp.; Mrs. Jones is the wife of Frank Jones, an investment consultant. The Book Shelf is owned in the name of Mime Corp.

Mrs. Jones said all the details of the merger have not been worked out, but The Book Shelf will be the surviving entity. The Blue and Gray is owned by Fritz Schas, Kathy Schas and Henry Turley Jr., Memphis real estate developer.

Mrs. Jones said it also has not been determined exactly how the ownership will be structured in the new arrangement, although Mrs. Schas is expected to become one of the principals.

Terms of the merger were not revealed.

The Book Shelf is located at 3436 Poplar, in Poplar Plaza. The Blue and Gray is located at 3546 Walker, near Memphis State University.

Ed Dunn

The Blue and Gray is not affiliated with MSU, although many people believe it is because its name is derived from the university's official colors, blue and gray.

The Book Shelf traces its roots to the 1930s, when it was founded by Montgomery Cooper. It operated for many years in Kimbrough Towers, the high-rise apartment building at Union and Kimbrough.

It subsequently was sold to Walter Pistole, who moved the operation to a location near Union and McLean.

In 1956, it was acquired by attorney Walter Armstrong Jr. and Earl Howry, who operated the store at the Union location for several years before moving to Poplar Plaza.

In 1978, the store was sold to George Jones, and Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Jones acquired it in 1979.

Mrs. Jones said current plans call for a liquidation sale at The Blue and Gray in August. After the sale, a determination will be made of which books to move to The Book Shelf location.

The Blue and Gray is a full-line general book store, specializing in paperbacks, classics, literature and science fiction. It also carries many of the textbooks required for various courses at MSU, as well as supplemental reading for courses. It was founded in the 1950s by a Memphis State professor, the late Enoch Mitchell, and was managed for a time by his wife.

He was chairman of the MSU history department and Mitchell Hall, which houses the history department, is named in his honor. At one time, Mitchell owned the Memphis State University Press.

Mrs. Jones said plans call for increasing The Book Shelf's selection of classics, literature and science fiction, as well as poetry, drama, criticism and philosophy.